

TEXT AND TALK ON THE UNITED NATIONS

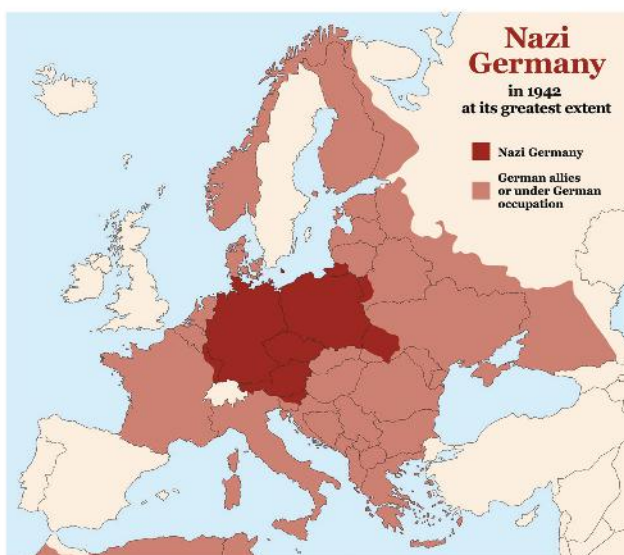
PART 1 – TUNING IN

16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS

FROM WAR TO PEACE

144

*World War II (1939 - 1945), also called **The Second World War**, was the most destructive war in all of history. Western technological advances turned against them, bringing about the most destructive war in human history.*



Germany's 1939 invasion of Poland triggered a chain of international alliances – countries that had pledged to come to each other's aid if attacked. The main combatants were the Axis powers, which included Germany, Italy, and Japan, versus the Allies, which included Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the US. When Germany invaded Poland on 1st September 1939, Great Britain and France responded by declaring war on Germany.

Seven days after the suicide of Adolf Hitler, Germany unconditionally surrendered on 7th May 1945. The Japanese would go on to fight for nearly four more

months until their surrender on 2nd September, which was brought on by the US dropping atomic bombs on the Japanese towns of Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

The war was in many respects a continuation, after 20 years, of the disputes left unsettled by World War I. The carnage of that war was unprecedented, its exact cost in human lives is unknown, but casualties in World War II may have totalled between 50 and 60 million service personnel and civilians killed.

Despite winning the war, Britain largely lost much of its empire. The USA and USSR emerged from World War II as global superpowers. The one-time allies became engaged in what was to be called the **Cold War**, which dominated world politics for the latter half of the 20th century.



The **United Nations (UN)** is an international organisation, which emerged in 1945 from the devastation of World War II. It aims to 'save succeeding generations from the scourge of war'. Its founders were shocked by the destruction of the war and the horrors of the Holocaust. They wanted to create an organisation that would be able to prevent such catastrophes from happening in the future.



1 **144** Read and listen to the text. In pairs, explain what the following refer to.

- 1 1939-1945: _____
- 2 the Axis powers: _____
- 3 the Allies: _____
- 4 Nagasaki and Hiroshima: _____
- 5 20 years: _____
- 6 50-60 million: _____
- 7 the United Nations: _____

2 **DIGITAL LITERACY** Do a web search about the most important events of the Second World War. Then complete the timeline below.

3 **CRITICAL THINKING** Why do you think the United Nations was founded at the end of WWII?

1939

Sept. 1st

Sept. 3rd

Sept. 17th

The Soviet Union invades Poland.

Nov. 30th

The Soviet Union invades Finland.

1941

June 22nd

Germany invades the Soviet Union, violating a 1939 non-aggression pact between the two countries. The Soviet Union joins Britain and France as one of the Allies.

Dec. 7th

1943

July 9th

The invasion of Sicily leads to Italy's surrender.

1944

June 6th

1940

June 10th

Italy invades France, after joining the war as an ally of Germany.

July 10th

Sept. 27th

Japan joins forces with Germany and Italy.

1942

Feb.-May

Japan conquers Singapore, the Philippines and Burma (now called Myanmar).

June 7th

1945

May 7th

Aug. 6th

Aug. 9th

Aug. 15th

Japan agrees to surrender, ending the war in Asia. The formal surrender ceremony takes place on 2nd September.



THE UNITED NATIONS

145

The organisation and its aims

The United Nations, which originally included 51 countries, has grown to include 193 member states. It is currently the largest international organisation in existence.

The mission and work of the United Nations are guided by the purposes and principles contained in its founding Charter. **The Charter** was signed on 26th June 1945. The United Nations officially came into existence on 24th October 1945. United Nations Day is celebrated on 24th October each year.

The UN's founding charter mandates four ambitious purposes. It maintains international peace. The UN's other three missions help to achieve that overarching goal. It fosters friendly relationships among its members, it solves international problems and promotes human rights, and it harmonises its members' actions.

In 1948, the United Nations proclaimed the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**. These include the right to not be enslaved, the right to free expression, and the right to seek from other countries asylum from persecution. According to the United Nations Foundation, it is the most translated document in the world. It is often said that many of the rights expressed – to education, to equal pay for equal work, to nationality – remain aspirational.

Issues are discussed by the member states of the United Nations during **caucuses** (or meetings) and formal sessions. After some **proposals** (or ideas) have been suggested, the ones with the most votes are selected in order to get widespread support. When a decision has been made as to how the United Nations will deal with a situation (for example, global warming), an action plan (also known as a **resolution**) is written about the steps that the United Nations and the involved countries will take.

The UN main organs

The United Nations **General Assembly** is the main decision-making body of the organisation where each member has one vote. In principle, nations small and large, rich and poor, have equal



voice in the Assembly. But the genuine power resides elsewhere. The 15-member **Security Council** is by far the most powerful arm of the United Nations. All UN members must comply with Security Council decisions, and the Council sends peace-keeping forces to restore order when needed. The Council can impose economic sanctions or an arms embargo to pressure countries that don't comply, and it authorises the UN's members to take military action if needed. It's often considered the most anachronistic part of the organisation. Its five permanent members are the victors of World War II: Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States. The other 10 members are elected for two-year terms. Efforts to expand the permanent membership to include powers that have emerged since 1945 – such as India, Japan and Germany – have been stymied. For every country that vies for a seat, rivals seek to block it. Any member of the permanent five can veto any measure, and each has regularly used this power to protect either itself or allies.

A global UN

The UN has six **official languages**: English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, and Mandarin.

The UN is working with so many very important **agencies** all over the world. These agencies are the World Health Organization (WHO), World Food Program (WFP) and the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

The main headquarters is located in New York. The UN also has three regional headquarters: one in Geneva (Switzerland); another in Vienna (Austria) and one in Nairobi (Kenya). These offices help represent the organisation's interests and facilitate diplomatic activities. The general assemblies take place at the global headquarters.

4 145 Read and listen to the text.

Then answer the questions.

- 1 How many countries were represented at the first session of the United Nations General Assembly? How many member states does the UN have at present?
- 2 Why is October 24th the UN day?
- 3 What is a UN resolution?
- 4 Which institution of the UN is like a parliament of nations which meets to consider the world's most pressing problems?
- 5 Explain the most important difference between the UN General Assembly and the Security Council.
- 6 Is Italian a UN official language?

5 **VOCABULARY** What does the UN do? Complete the text with the words or phrases below.

has been wiped off • specialised agencies
living conditions • atomic energy • are enshrined
global progress • humanitarian aid
climate change • education • are supplied

The United Nations is indispensable to tackling humanity's greatest challenges and driving
1 _____. In its 70 plus years, the UN has worked to reduce conflict and maintain peace around the world, alleviate poverty, advance human rights, and deepen cooperation around shared purpose. Since its creation the United Nations has added on new challenges, such as 2 _____, refugees and AIDS. While conflict resolution and peacekeeping continue to be among its most visible efforts, the UN, along with its 3 _____, is also engaged in a wide array of activities to improve people's lives around the world – from disaster relief, through 4 _____ and advancement of women, to peaceful uses of 5 _____.

Important facts:

- Smallpox 6 _____ the planet
- Vaccines 7 _____ to 45% of the world's children thus saving 3 million lives a year
- Human rights 8 _____ in international law
- All 193 member states agree on 17 Sustainable Development Goals
- The UN fights poverty by helping 370 million rural poor individuals achieve better 9 _____
- Every year the UN mobilises \$12.5 billion in 10 _____.

6 **CRITICAL THINKING** Explain three ways in which the UN works to make the world a better place.

7 146 **TOWARDS INVALS!** Listen to some curious facts about the United Nations. Then answer the questions in no more than 4 words.

- 1 What organism did the UN replace after WWII?
- 2 Which state became a UN member in 2011?
- 3 When was the UN given the Nobel Prize for Peace?
- 4 Which countries are not UN members?
- 5 When were the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN?

PART 3 – SORTING OUT

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

In the wake of World War II world leaders got together to work out how to avoid future atrocities such as the Holocaust. In 1948 they created a document which is called the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (UDHR). It sets out all the rights every human should have.

8 In groups do the following task.

- Brainstorm 'What are human rights?' and write three words to sum up your group's ideas. Make a class list in the form of a word wall of these words: for each word provide your own definition.
- Read the Preamble to the UDHR and highlight the three words you think are most important. Feedback these words to the class and compare them with the class list made in the previous step. How similar are the ideas of the class with those of the leaders of the world in 1948?
- Read the UDHR and discuss the following:
 - Which right would you eliminate and why?
 - If you had to make a new right, what would it be?
 - Are all these rights enjoyed by everybody in the world? And in Italy?
- Choose a human right which particularly interests you and research how it varies around the world. Discuss why this specific right is important to protect and think of any examples where it is denied.
- Create a two-minute video advertisement for young people illustrating the importance of this specific human right.

